Ink and Ice

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Ink and Ice

by Malaishik (Coranthium)

Summary

Even in a world shattered, life moves on. For Will, death is an Entity ever present, perhaps more so then he even realizes…

Notes

I do not own Hannibal or Death Stranding.

Anomaly

Hello! Before we start I would like to say a few things...

First, this is my first time writing fanfiction. Please be kind to me. I am open to advice and I hope to learn and improve.

Second, disclaimer. I do not own anything Hannibal or Death Stranding.

Third, a warning. This will contain spoilers for Death Stranding and Hannibal. Please go watch and play those first.

And finally, some explaining. I have some theories regarding Death Stranding that created the base of this story. They are as follows...

Chiral network and Cliff: Cliff is a stronger version of a BT. The reason that he appeared later in the game is because the connection between the Other (BT reality) and the "real" reality wasn't strong enough. BTs are "spirits" who are too weak to fight the bridge between realities created by chiralium and timefall. Cliff is too strong to be pulled down, but too weak to create his own bridge. He has "ties" to the "real" reality, but cannot follow them. However when the chiral network kicks off, it starts to thin the wall between realities allowing him to pull Sam into a bridge between realities, a "Beach".

Baby dolls: The baby dolls are not used to control people, but are a manifestation of Amelie/Bridget's lies. She controls people without them (Higgs during his time with Fragile, Cliff before his death) but they appear to give the user a power that Amelie/Bridget lied to them about. Cliff used them to see, he was blinded by her promise to save his son. Higgs used his as a BB, Amelie promised him power over them.

Feel free to let me know what you think about my theories. For those who haven't played Death Stranding or who don't remember it, there will be a glossary at the end to clarify terms. And without further ado, the first chapter!

Death has an aura.

Beyond the shadows it casts and the pain it brings. Past the tears and screams and heartbreak. Rot, blood, fear, lost; hold the mind hostage, feeding the darkness and clouding the senses. Even in this world, he watched others be consumed by these distractions. But he never let them catch him. To him, death was cold. Its raw energy, invisible and petrifying to the others who were blind, washed over him as a frigid rush. Its presence held him, supported him, painted for him; firm hands carving details and emotions with glacial clarity. Much like crystal, like ice, an algid mirror, capturing the end of life.

When a person gives their last breath in peace, he would liken the feeling to a morning fog; the gentle breeze and cool caresses. More often he feels the cutting chill and harsh bite caused by violence, death flushed with a lingering burn. Occasionally he finds the air thick with the heavy sharp cold of a life cut short, quick and unexpected. In this world, death was complex, flavored with clawing desperation, bitterness of failure, and the icy fangs of fear. BTs were different. The phantoms reeked of death, the cold clings to them, charged with a crystalline energy. Even without his DOOMS, the slicing chill warned him well in advance. While he avoided the BTs and used plenty of caution, he found that they never caused him any trouble. If anything, he enjoyed the Timefall and the silence it brought, as the world cycled through life and death.

He found comfort in the cold, found it familiar, constant. In his mind, there was never a time without it that he remembered, but he knew the story of his plunge. He remembered the feeling.

The first time he fell, Will changed. His father told him he had been a happy child, sensitive but kind. He was six when he felt the cold. He remembered the knives of ice, the howling wind, the biting freeze. They never understood, never felt it. No one could figure out why he suddenly broke down, why he cried, why he changed. After three days, he had calmed, but gone was the joyous child. In his place was one who was quiet, withdrawn, odd, and complex. His sensitivity turned sharp, and his mind a fortress. While Will had not been popular before, he ended up alone after. In the years that past he grew used to death, to being alone.

It was no surprise that following his fathers' death he became a porter. He has a house, a bunker tucked away north of Mountain Knot City. He shared with his adopted daughter Abigail and Winston, their dog, a rarity in this world. He has friends; Jack in Capital Knot, Freddie in Port Knot, Chiyoh in Lake Knot, Zeller, Price, and Katz in South Knot, Alana and Margot in Mount Knot. He knew he should be happy and in a way he was.

But something was missing.

As an independent porter, Will's jobs were usually short, however occasionally he took a larger one to Port or Capital Knot. While he enjoyed the cooler weather around his home, there was something breathtaking about the mountains and valleys of green that painted the eastern coast. The sense of isolation created by the vast landscape and blankets of mist comforted him with silence and peace. Even Mules and BTs seemed fewer and farther apart.

So despite the grueling trek and weight on his back, Will felt lively, albeit tired, when he passed through the gates of Capital Knot City. His back ached as he mentally reviewed his orders, walking down the entrance to the distribution center. A case of medicine, some

materials, and two devices far beyond his realm of understanding ended up on the deposit station as the network processed his delivery. He skimmed through most of the following report, noting the low damage assignment and efficient time. The chimes of the computer blended with the ones from his com. device. Will raised his wrist.

“Hello?”

The air was filled with the cracklings of static, far more than what was normal.

“...W.....l.....i.....l.....”

The voice was barely audible through the static. Concerned, Will turned all of his attention to the call. He knew that Bridges’ “chiral network” was a work in progress, but even between cities the network was never this bad. His mind ran over scenarios and possible causes as he opened his private locker.

“Hello? Jack? I can’t... What’s going on?”

Will waited for a response after he finished loading his packages into his locker.

“....ill.....e...t....he....Com...un...a..tio.....en...er...der...and.....omm...n..cat...ion...C.....nt..r..”

The Communication Center.

Alarmed, Will folded up his cargo brace and shut his locker.

“Okay. On my way.”

The call cut off, signaling that Jack understood, or at least Will hoped so. He took a deep breath and started towards the exit with uneasy creeping up his spine. The Distribution Center seemed fine and nothing looked out of place when he arrived, making his mind churn over what could be wrong. Mechanical or electrical problems would have surely affected the center as well, and chiralium was immune to Timefall, and as destructive as it was, the damage caused by it was gradual. Will evaluated the surrounding buildings as he left the center. There was no sign of trouble or damage, but the swirling clouds over head caught his attention.

Timefall had not started but he wouldn’t be surprised if it did soon. Everyone seemed to be of the same mindset as the street were bare, lacking the usual workers scurrying around. To him the grey world felt charged with an unsettling energy: the wind shifted with impatience, anticipation crawling under the surface.The Communication Center loomed as Will grew close, the entrance devoured the outside light, shadows wrapping around him as he entered. Standing at the door leaving the antechamber was a technician, the one degraded to be a courier for him, Will assumed. He was proven right when she waved him in and entered led him into the main building.

They continued through the sterile white halls that weaved through the area, intimidating with their seemingly endless number. Will always found them suffocating and in some ways terrifying. The detached, clinical aura told him that here, reason prevailed over emotion, and

sometime logic prevailed over morals. People here believed that the many outweigh the few and that the key to survival is progress, evolution. Every trip reminded Will that one day, their eyes could turn to him and his "gift"as they called it. Every time he entered he feared they wouldn't let him leave.

Finally, the technician led him through a set of doors that opened to reveal a laboratory of some sort. Standing in front of a screen, displaying a video call with the scientist known as Mama, was Jack, looking every bit as powerful as his spirit. His preferred black attire contrasted with the lab, shoulders back, hands grasped behind his back as his presence was focused on his conversation. Jack Crawford was an intense person- sharp eyes, powerful voice, never one to compromise. So when his gaze turned, all Will could do was brace for the inevitable impact.

"Will!"

As always, Jack's voice boomed. Will shuffled forward into the socially acceptable range for conversation and gave an awkward smile. While he knew Jack was a good man, Will knew his priorities lay with his job and as much as he trusted Jack, Bridges was another story. Will was too smart to trust the monopolizing company, regardless of their claims to "make America whole again". America was gone. The old world was gone. Will had accepted that. Some, like Jack, however, still clung to the idea.

"Hey, Jack…What's going on…"

By now Jack had positioned himself at an angle, to face both him and the screen. Will knew from his stance and face that something had happened. His eyes told the rest.

Concern. Unease. Anticipation. Fear? No...

"Will… Earlier this morning we launched the first alpha of the chiral network… As we expected it eventually failed after about two hours, however…"

Jack gestures to the screen which showed what appeared to be a weather radar of sorts. Will was no expert, but it wasn't hard to understand that one, warmer colors are bad and cooler colors are good, and two, he was looking at a lot of yellow. He looked to Jack for clarification who in turn looked to Mama. She sighed.

"The chiral density increased sharply when we launched the network, we expected it to fall when it stopped, but… it seems to have settled at a constant level. While it is not at a dangerous or even extremely high, its presence has interfered with communications."

Will nodded. It made sense, but something stuck out.

"What does this have to do with me?"

When both perked up, dread filled him. Jack enjoyed his high position in Bridges, but he preferred being more directly involved with field work and most of the time that lead to Will doing "favors", more like nightmares, for him. While he had never formally met Mama, everyone knew of her love for science and her odd, shrouded character. She never left her lab

and held an irregular schedule. Will never participated in gossiping, but he wouldn't be surprised if there was some truth to what was said. Still he knew he was defended before Jack even opened his mouth and, with a sigh, Will decided to go ahead and bite.

"Alright, what do you want me to do?"

Timefall: rain that ages everything it touches, grass grows and dies in a continuous cycle when it falls, it weathers buildings and ages people until they die

Chiralium/Chiral: a new element introduced during the Death Stranding, immune to Timefall, toxic in large amounts, a base for a new information network similar to the internet, creates Timefall

Knot Cities: cities created after the Death Stranding, usually supported by Bridges, places that rely on porters to deliver supplies

BT: an invisible creature from a world of death, can only be seen, sensed, or detected by people with DOOMS or a BB, summoned by Timefall, drags people to a larger BT who consumes them and triggers a voidout (massive explosion)

Bridges: a large company that focuses on deliveries, technology, science, and the chiral network, founded BBs

DOOMS: the ability to sense or see BTs, higher levels can use the Beach to teleport or even control them, chiral allergy causes them to cry when exposed to BTs

BB: bridge babies, babies with brain death mothers that allow an odradek (terrain scanner) to locate BTs, treated like equipment

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What do you think?

Again this is my first attempt at writing so please let me know how it is.

Thank you for reading!

Heat

This one was already finished so I decided to go ahead and post it.

Please enjoy!!

Investigate the center of the cloud formation. Simply deliver the machine. Easy.

Will knew that things were never that simple.

The maw of the unknown held just as much if not more danger than the world of the known. Especially now, with BTs and Timefall. If anything, Will felt that the state of the world highlighted this fact. Aside from that, it still held true that danger drew in danger, gathering it in droves. Between him and his destination stood rocky cliffs, gaping valleys, MULES, BTs, and Timefall.

All this work to study the eye of the abnormal swirling clouds. Will understood the concern surrounding them. The alarming chiral density, the disruptive effect on technology, the nightmarish idea of Timefall *storms* developing. They were valid fears and good reasons to investigate. Still he knew the trip would be rough.

Following his briefing, of which he understood maybe a third, he focused on preparing for his journey. Given the situation, he had no time to rest, and since he was not Bridges personnel, his access to resources were limited. Thankfully, due to the purpose of the mission, his load was light: boots, rations, Odradek, his bola gun, and of course the machine, for lack of a better term, that would gather the needed information from the location. Then Will completed the form confirming his contract with Bridges and send it with a flick of his finger. Much to Jack's disappointment, he refused to join Bridges, preferring independence and his PCD over their handcuffs. They could call it whatever they want, but Will wasn't dumb.

A few hours after he entered, Will found himself leaving Capital Knot. After taking a second to map his path, to maximize the ease of the trip, he was once again enveloped in the still calm of nature. Behind him, Capital Knot faded, still visible but muted, distant compared to the flowing grass and whispering river, guided by the rich dark earth. The wind combed through his hair, carrying the smell of petrichor, fresh, clean. The ground is soft, aside from the scattered rocks that littered the landscape, dirt melds with sand on the banks of the rivers. The cold water, deep and strong, curled across the land like a serpent.

The cold silver and black of metal stood out, not clashing, but not blending. Ladders bridged the rivers, generators and postboxes rose like graves from the grass. When Will reached the mountains, tall towers of green and gray, he made use of the anchors that dotted the side. With his light load, he scaled the mountain fairly quickly. From the peak, he could gaze out at the world and for a brief moment, he felt at peace. The moment passed and Will started on his path again, working his way over ridges and around cliffs. He sensed the Timefall before he

saw it, putting up his hood and pulling a cover over his cargo. As the mist rolled in he powered up his Odradek and turned on his visual display, allowing him to see the terrain markers. It came as no surprise when a few minutes later he sensed the BTs, followed by a rainbow appearing overhead.

Will watched the wraith like figures appear, transparent and featureless, but not invisible, as if they were warping and bending reality around their floating forms with their cords dancing like ribbons. The air was charged with the biting chill of the BTs, filling him as he weaved between them. It felt denser the closer he moved to the center, clinging to him and pulling. When he arrived however, nothing seemed to stand out, aside from the swirling clouds overhead. Will removed that machine from his back and swiftly set it up, following the instructions he had been given. It clicked once as it started, then left him to the sound of the Timefall and BTs as he waited. He used the time to survey his surroundings, to feel.

When the burning heat hit Will, it nearly drove him to his knees.

It crashed and grasped at him, desperate and raw, trying to steady and failing to balance. Time seemed to fail as it burned then soothed, wild in nature, out of control. Will felt his grasp on reality slip as the cold of the BTs was driven out, the space consumed by the untamable warmth. His eyes slid closed as whispers filled his ears, unintelligible but calming, as it wrapped around him, gently firm, occupying every sense. He was complete.

Then it was gone, ripped away.

Will gasped as the emptiness and cold returned. He felt his whole body shaking, the bite of the air, the tears on his cheeks as ringing echoed through his ears and his mouth went dry. His eyes clenched shut and his focus went to grounding himself, reconnecting with reality. Mind racing, he attempted to collect and reassemble the pieces of his walls, taking measured breaths.

My name is Will Graham. It is some time past noon, but before evening. I am outside of Capital Knot, in the mountains. I am investigating the center of a chiral cloud formation.

Will took a deep breath, steadied his body, and opened his eyes.

The clouds were gone. It's the first thing he notices, followed by the lack of BTs and the associated chill. Misty but fairly clear skies meet his gaze, capturing his bewilderment before the whirling of the machine comes to his attention. It trills a chime and folds up into a sturdy box shape, then powers down. Moments later, his PCD beeped, followed by the sound a surprisingly static free com line. Jack's voice cut through the fog in his head.

“Will? Will! What happened?”

His thoughts spun, still off balance from the previous events. Cautiously he loaded the machine onto his back as he searched for words, since all seemed to have left him.

“I… don’t know… did you get your data?”

He breathed deeply as he started on the path back. In the moments it took him to respond Will could sense Jack’s hesitation, but couldn’t decipher it’s cause.

“The preliminary report just came through. Just basics we already know; high chiral density, spiral movement, the like. We’ll examine the rest when you return. What’s worrying is that seconds after the evaluation started, it all disappeared. What did you see?”

Will froze as his mind panicked, fear of questions and scientific curiosity, tore at his chest. He quickly decided to refrain from mentioning the heat, for his own safety, he justified. Carefully he spun a lie as he began moving again.

“I didn’t see anything. I was on the lookout for BTs when the clouds just kinda… left. Nothing seemed special… sorry…”

Not too detailed, not too vague. Reasonable.

Will pushed back the thoughts of the heat, prioritizing his story and conversation for the time being. He let out a silent sigh of relief when Jack let out his own audible one of disappointment, taking it as a sign that his lie was mistaken for a truth.

“Okay, make your way back. Drop off the machine at the distribution center and get some rest. We’ll let you know what we find tomorrow…”

That drew a real sigh from Will, and before he could respond the line was cut. He rolled his eyes at the obvious hook. Jack used every chance he could to try and pull him in, regardless of how many times he expressed his feelings about Bridges. So time and time again he found himself here: disappointed but not surprised. This time, however, he found himself fighting curiosity. What he experienced, the power, the heat, was something he had never felt before and somehow he craved it. He had an idea of where he could find some answers, if only that.

Will knew that in order to find it again, he would have to bite.

As always, feel free to let me know what you think!

Point

I have a beta! The lovely [miraculous_stardust] has been helping me edit these chapters so all the thanks to them!!

Also see the end of the chapter for some notes about my take on the world!

When Will returned to find a room waiting for him at Bridges, he was stuck between relief and annoyance. After settling on a combination of the two, he wasted no time stripping and cleaning himself up. As the dirt, sweat, and chiralium washed down the drain, he felt his mind unwind, tension dissipating, walls folding away. He could feel the experience catching up to him as his hands trembled. It had been terrifying just as much as it had been exciting. Never before had he sensed something warm and this energy, this power, had been strong enough to bleed out to his entire body. Most of the time, the effect was internal, really more of an awareness than an actual feeling, although sometimes his body reacted, triggering goosebumps or giving a shiver from a breeze no one else knew about.

Will always found it hard to explain his ‘ability’. He sensed death, that part was easy, but the cold- that he struggled to describe, often using words that contradict while still ringing true. This time he found himself with the opposite of his usual problem; he could understand the feeling, but not the cause. He told himself that he had stopped being surprised by his gift years ago, so despite his current reacquaintance with it, he resolved to use his usual solution: waiting. He would understand it eventually, or at the very least understand the cause. Tomorrow he would be given more information surrounding the situation and then he could plan. What happened happen, what didn't, didn't. Will would waste no time worrying over what was out of his hands.

His shower, sadly, had to come to an end, and he retired to his provided bed, eager to get whatever rest he could; knowing with his nightmare, it was never much. Will found it deceptively easy to slip off to sleep, his body tired and worn out. Tendrils of warmth and the faint smell of smoke joined him in his mind, clashing with the faceless terrors that preyed on him, dissonant whispers with the screams and cries. Still, after Will found himself jolting awake with panic, drenched with sweat. He was surprised to find that six hours had passed instead of his regular four. Grateful, but still exhausted, he remained curled up in his covers, drifting between the realms of sleep and consciousness, for the rest of the night.

When Will rose the following morning, he found a message from Jack waiting for him, asking him to report to the lab as soon as he could. After another, much quicker, shower, something he would never take for granted, Will swiftly gathered his belongings and headed back to the Communication Center. On his way, he noted how healthy Capital Knot now looked. The shields looked strong, shimmering in the sunlight, above the people milling around, enjoying the day, some working, others not. The buzz of machinery filled the air alongside the hum of voices. He felt the shift as he entered the building, gold light replaced

by white, the air stuffier. As he made his way through the building- with a guide, of course, he had no interest in wandering lost- the atmosphere seem oppressive and claustrophobic.

As the door opened, Will found himself in the tail end of an argument between Jack and Alana Bloom, and from the cut off of conversation and faces looking at him, he has no doubt about the topic of conversation. Joining Alana and Mama in the circle of screens surrounding Jack is Beverly Katz, who grinned like the devil. Alana settled her feathers as Mama tuned back in from wherever she went while they argued over him, something he found thoroughly embarrassing. As he fought to keep his face from flushing, he cleared his throat.

“Sorry to… interrupt.”

If possible, Beverly’s smile grew larger.

“Look what the cat dragged in! You’re a mess, Will!”

He couldn’t help the upward turn of his lips.

“Well some of us actually leave our bunkers and get a life. Might want to try it sometime.”

Alana gave a warm smile at Beverly’s snort and his resulting laughter, while Jack seemed annoyed by the immature humor. Mama was neutral as always.

“It’s good to see you, Will. I was worried…”

He held in a sigh at her blatant jab at Jack, despite her well meaning intentions. Will knew he was different, special. Jack knew it too and he had no qualms using his gift. He knew there was a reason, beyond convenience, that he was sent out yesterday. Even with his dislike of Bridges, he trusted Jack. He knew what Will could handle, wasted no time on inflating risks and scare tactics, on fine print and unimportant details. One day, he knew he would regret it, Jack would push too far, he would crack and shatter. Honestly, he saw it as inevitable, his ability is just as much a curse as it was a blessing. Really, he was grateful for Alana. She always looked out for him, quick to scent out a fishy order or hidden danger hidden below the lines of text. Will was sure he probably owed her his life a couple of times. He knew if it was up to her he would be at home with Abigail and Winston, working a standard job in Mountain Knot, safe and sound. Luckily her wife Margot helped him convince her that Jack wasn't forcing him to work, Will enjoyed it. Still, Alana despised how Jack glossed over the dangers and sent him into the wild unknown. Jack’s healthy mix of fear and respect for her clashed with his own stubbornness often leading to long drawn out arguments, with both sides refusing to back down. Will could see the embers rising again in Jack and decided to redirect the fire.

“I’m fine. What did you all find out about the storm yesterday?”

The tension dissipated as everyone refocused. Jack looked to Mama, a gesture to explain. Quickly she seemed to slide comfortably into the skin.

“Data from the ‘storm’ as you called it was irregular, but overall inconclusive. The formation was composed of primarily nimbostratus and cumulus congestus clouds, chiral density falls

in the 60 percentile with a 15 percent increase… “

The words lost meaning, far outside of Will understanding, still he waited for her to finish. After a few seconds she finally did as he glanced around the room to evaluate the thoughts of others, to see if he was the only one left out, and fortunately, he wasn't. For once, Jack and Alana were both lost as well. Beverly however, seemed to understand completely, her face unreadable. Jack was the one to ask.

“Okay, but what does that *mean* ? In layman’s terms, please.”

Mama sighed as Beverly grinned, smug to be in on it.

“It *means* it’s just some weird clouds.”

That earned her an annoyed look from Mama.

“No, it means that there is *not enough data* to conclude what *exactly* happened or what it might cause. We’ll have to monitor the situation and see if more instances occur.”

At that, Alana relaxed and Jack huffed, while Will found himself both relieved and frustrated. Once again Jack stepped forward.

“So it’s not dangerous…”

“No. As I *said*, we don’t know what it is or could be. *Currently* it’s not, but that doesn’t mean it can’t become so.”

Disappointed, Jack turned to him. Will knew the words before they left his mouth.

“Will. I want you to assist us in examining these phenomena.”

Alana flared up immediately, eyes burning.

“ ***Jack*** ! We don’t know anything about *this* ! It could grow larger and more powerful! *Dangerous* ! And you want to send him in *blind* ?!”

Jack set himself like stone, preparing to meet her flames. Will could only hunker down and hope for no crossfire.

“You heard Mama. It’s not currently dangerous. If it starts changing, *we need to know.* We can’t send drones with the Timefall, and we can only learn so much through remote monitoring. Will is one of the best porters out there, he will be *fine* .”

“You don’t *know* that! We can’t predict what will happen. He could get trapped in the Timefall and by BTs.”

“Will is *capable* and we’ll provide support. If something happens we can send help.”

“He could ***die*** !”

“That’s *always* a risk!”

“It doesn’t *have* to be!”

“STOP!”

The room fell silent, everyone looked at Will as he took a deep breath to calm down before speaking again.

“It’s my choice.”

He focused on Jack first.

“Jack, I appreciate your trust in me, but please let me think before signing me up.”

Will turned to Alana.

“I know you care for me, but please don’t try and control my life. I know it’s dangerous. Hell- everything in this world is! I’m not made of glass and if I do shatter it’s my own damn fault.”

With a sigh, he closed his eyes and settled himself. He reopened them and addressed the group as a whole.

“I’m sorry for the disruption. I would like to join your investigation surrounding the anomalies. However, I would prefer to handle the field work and want housing outside of Bridges. And please let Alana review it before sending it to me.”

Jack shifted, before nodding, knowing better than to gloat.

“Very well. I’ll draw up the contract and alert you when it’s done.”

Will return his nod and gave everyone a strained smile.

“It will be a pleasure working with you, Mama…Alana, it was good to see you, let Margot know I hope she’s well.”

He gave a more honest grin at the pride painted on Beverly’s face.

“Beverly… try and remember to call once and awhile.”

She returned a smirk.

“I’ll try and make room.”

With a final nod, Will turned and walked out the door.

One step forward…

Hey! Some quick notes about the world that I’m painting in this fic.

First, I am taking extreme artistic liberty in the details of the world. Many parts of life in the game are missing due to the focus on a nomadic resident and extreme cases.

To put it simply, we know nothing about the common man. We know about the routine of Sam, an antisocial porter taking a special long trip under the provisions of Bridges, and we see a glimpse at the lives of people like Mama and Heartman, people confined to one place for the entirety of the game. So we have one person who never stays in one place for more than a night and others who never leave their homes, nothing in between. We also only see the people whose lives are supported by Bridges.

We can glean some information:

Furnishings and decorations are still popular (Heartman)

Sam's 'rooms' are akin to hospital/corporate provided room (ie. necessities only)

Some things (chiral network, cufflinks, etc.) seem to only be used by Bridges or are controlled by them

We never see long duration housing, like apartments. While this makes sense on some levels it still falls short. Sam moves at an astonishingly fast pace, by the reactions of others. Most porters appear to spend long periods traveling and staying. Most probably don't hike to a city, stay one night, and go back. They most likely make the trek to a city, stay there for sometime, taking local jobs, and then leave. For some jobs (ex the one in here) it's easier to hire and train one person to handle the field work. Then you have someone at the ready to venture out on command who knows the details of the situation.

Another note is that simply accepting orders seems to be tied to Bridges and their cufflinks. While Sam (and his lack of caring) tends to simply pick up and drop off, it would make sense that someone who actually cared about the details of their job would require an actual contact, detailing the specifics, especially for longer jobs. All 'paperwork' is still digital, but the jobs taken by independent porters and the auch still would probably have some sort of detailed information exchange.

*Sam is amazing but he doesn't really care about his job, he's more focused on the isolation and the drive (point A to point B) it provides for him

Also I imagine luxury and style are still prevalent. Everything is recyclable. Decorations can be deconstructed into materials and thus can be created on request, similar to online shopping, allowing for personalization. This is a sign of wealth and resources (<<_ looking at you Bridges). I imagine the 'apartments' of Bridges are in a simple way customized to each resident. All these things are deconstructed and reused after the resident leaves. This allows for comfortable living for longer periods of time.

Also things like long range communications are reserved for important (aka rich) sectors of society like science. So most messages are passed from porter to porter until they reach the nearest Knot city to the destination, then a request for direct delivery is used.

Also concerning the chiral network, I know in the game it’s a connect and go system but I believe the creation of that system took time and trial and error. So this takes place maybe 6 months before the start of the game.

Thank you to everyone who has bothered to read this fanfic and extra thanks to those who gave it kudos.

Special thanks to Lucioleeteinte and DuugaDuuga for their comments, I'm really happy that you like this.

Till next time!

Stance

Will spent the rest of his day smoothing out his plans. He started by recording a HVM, Hologram Video Message, for Abigail, detailing his decision to remain in Capital Knot, while excluding his experience with the storm- he could never know who was listening. The HVM would be passed from porter to porter until it arrived at his home. The process was slow but much cheaper than buying time on the SCN. The Standard Communications Network was part of what remained from the old world, constantly worn with Timefall. Fast but costly in maintenance, it was mostly monopolized by Bridges, the only ones with the resources to keep it running, to allow communication centered around the creation of the chiral network. Still, Bridges were fighting a losing battle with it against the Timefall. The fact that it will eventually erode away, fueled the fire behind Bridges. Will disliked Bridges, but he could understand their position on this matter. In a world shattered to pieces, communication was essential.

After submitting his message, Will found himself with enough free time to explore Capital Knot. While survival was the first priority, there was still plenty to simply enjoy. He browsed the market area, absorbing the energy and watching resources pass from hand to hand. After he left the boundary of the city to spend some time by the shore of the sea. For once the beach was natural, in this reality; no Seam or BTs. Just the smell of salt and the roar of the waves, low and soothing. Time left Will's head as he drifted in the serenity.

The chime of his PCD startled him, hours later, alerting him that his contract had been drafted up. Not wanting to ruin the peace of the area, he opted to return to the city for dinner and to review the document. Overall the rest of the day passed by; he had a standard dinner, settled and signed the contract, located his housing unit and transferred his equipment. At the end of the day, he found himself mindlessly performing his nightly routine and only when he was tucked into bed did his mind turn to the day before.

The memory wrapped around him as he envisioned the feeling, imagined the tendrils reaching out, cradling him as he held them in return. He drifted, lost in the safety, in the sense of home. He was moving, he wasn't sure how he knew, the world around him was liquid, shifting and incomprehensible. Still he felt the change, from a distant feeling of familiarity to a foreign comfort. It approached him, whispering in a language beyond his understanding, but he understood its confusion, its curiosity. Experimental touches passed between them and Will found his discoveries were understood, but beyond his conscious comprehension. He knew, but he didn't know.

Suddenly, something pulled him back, like a current. He felt the warmth protest, an inaudible whine and desperate tugs, trying to keep him there. He clung to it, whispering promises to return, not wanting to leave its safety. They were torn apart, Will, whisked away. He felt his body cool as his mind returned to the waking world. He tried to hold on, feeling his dreams fade, grasping at them as they slipped like water through his fingers. Soon, all that was left was the memory of warmth and the tears on his cheeks.

It had been ages since Will had a dream that made him cry, at least one that didn't haunt him for hours after. The world seemed frozen, paused in silence. For a minute he just layed in bed, simply existing, letting his mind empty and his heart breath through the tears. He was weightless, floating.

The moment ended. The world continued to spin, time started again, life began. And when it did, a part of him died.

His walls went up, as he checked his PCD as he rose from bed. One call from Jack, one from… the director of Bridges? He blinked and checked again. Sure enough there was a message from the director. One titled Meeting with the President. Will's head spun as he tried to comprehend the meaning behind the message.

The president wants to meet me. ***ME*** .

The thought filled him with anxiety. It dug its claws in his insides and twisted. Quickly, he took a deep breath, hands shaking.

Breathe.

He ran through his calming exercises as he sat on his bed, counting and tapping his fingers. After what felt like forever, he felt steady. Or at least well enough to open Jack's message. The purpose was the same, informing him of his scheduled meeting with the president… who was also the head of Bridges. He knew the importance of such a move, both for him and for Jack. He couldn't screw this up. Even if he didn't care about Bridges and, by association, distrusted the president, he couldn't do that to Jack. He sighed as he stood up and moved to his bathroom.

Wake up first, worry later .

He was going to take his time cleaning up. He had no plans today except for the meeting, which was scheduled for later in the afternoon. He had plenty of time to relax, panic, calm down and repeat.

Fun.

Still he knew that, all anxiety aside, he would be okay. To fill his remaining free time, he settled on putting to use the 'comfort fund', a fancy term for 'credits to make your room look less like a cell', that he had been given. Bridges had many rooms for porters and the like to stay in, but for long term habitation, many preferred their independent living options. The simple apartment-like homes came furnished and clean as can be, in shades of the standard white. Along with the key, the user was given credits to buy 'accessories' to improve their

sterile new home. Although, Will felt his room looked more like something out of an advertisement. He could tell this room had been prepared for him. Things he missed last night, too tired or out of it, like the nicer lighting fixtures, fine carpets, unique decor and plethora of mirrors spoke of customization, in a professional, detached style. Fancy fixings and complex decorations were signs of wealth, comfort and luxury in the dying world.

Still could use some improvement…

Will felt no shame at his preferences, enjoying shades of blue, fish and canine themes and interesting gadgets as decor. Beverly would often tease him, saying that the only things you needed to please Will Graham were dogs, a fishing pole and a 'quiet little house', and truthfully that's all he needed before Abigail. Now his world included her.

He adopted Abigail after her father, a hidden terrorist, tried to kill his family to cause a void out. Unfortunately for him, Will had been assigned to drop off a package on that day. When no one answered the door, he investigated and found Abigail's mother dead and her father about to cut her throat. After a brutal fight that ended with her throat sliced and her father dead, Abigail survived and the bodies made it to the incinerator in time. It traumatized them both, leading Will to move them out of Mountain Knot. He had a bunker constructed north of the city, in a cave near the river.

Abigail was clever and found that she had a talent for technology. While Will continued his job as a porter, Abigail stayed at home and created complex coding that blew his mind. When he was home, they would, weather permitting, take a trip to the river to fish, with Winston always joining. They were Will's world, Abigail and Winston, waiting to welcome him home, keeping him company through the pictures saved to his PCD. Even now, in the aftermath of an amazing new experience, he missed them.

They lingered in his thoughts as he shopped on the provided tablet, choosing pillows in marine and prussian, little ceramic dogs, and self sustaining plants. He didn't hesitate to use all of the given credits on his favorite supplies and decor. After all, if Will was going to stay here, he would make himself comfortable.

Hello!

Some notes…

Timefall only affects what it first touches. Once it comes into contact with something it turns into regular water. So animals who live underwater are unaffected by Timefall directly (excluding the effect of food sources ect.). Considering how long it has been since the death stranding took place, animals (the idea that all animals are dead is BS(We see some in the opening!!)) have adapted to live around the Timefall (ex. Finding shelter, changing food sources).

I imagine currency is only used for more centralized exchange. People like Sam, constant porter have no use for it, they only need food, water, shelter and supplies in exchange for their service. So in this way credits are used like money, ex. 4 credits for a pillow, but are not really money, more like a representation of how much resources they

can use. The more resources needed to fabricate an object, the more credits are required to order it. After they are no longer needed, the objects are deconstructed, recycled, and reused. This allows for higher comfort while efficiently cycling resources.

If you have any questions, feel free to ask!

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